2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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Fishermen often travel among the islands in rowboats. These two men are preparing to row from Yonges Island to Wadmalaw.

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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[226]
[868]

Sea Island children are intimately familiar with the ocean and learn the art of casting and netting as early as the age of three.

[p. 154]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Joe Deas

WE BEEN CLIMBING ON THE ROUGH SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN

159 735 From the time I have sense enough to recollect in this world, we have trouble and crosses, ups and downs. We been climbing on the rough side of the mountain—climbing up, falling back, grabbin' bottom.

Way back yonder, in 1893, we had to work for something to eat. Work on the white folks' farm, move from place to place, eat with stick for spoon. (262) Got oshter, fish, crab and 'tato. Get corn meal, carry 'em to the mill and grind 'em and eat corn meal. Sweet potato. All that just to bring us this far. And I say thank God that I live to see light come into the world. Wise man from all part of the world come into *this* world. The world is lifting up more and more.

(501) My old parents didn't see these things—automobile, airplane. We come from rowboat time. Had to row from home to town and back. Sometime I have to stay a whole day; have to wait on the tide, all that to row. And God spare us live to see this day.

(492) (493) We used to drive with ox and cart, haul wood with old oxen, plow with oxen. All that. Today no oxen. Nothing but car and truck and bus and trailer and all kind of thing like that.

159 735 178 262 Old days you couldn't eat nothing but 'tato and peas and corn and corn flour and crab and all like them. Well these days it's Christmas every day. Anything you want now you get 'em. In them days back, if one somebody kill a hog in the community, you think it was Christmas by the hog only. But now, eat hog meat any day you want. Go from store to store to get the thing you want. It's Christmas every day now for we. Light come into the world. Them times we had to buy, and money was so little, you can't see your way to buy what you need for live. Had to make out 'til we leave the white folks' place and then start to come up.

735 198 It's a blessing we see the day. Everybody lifting up. God put a way to your brains to catch on to these things, that you may have bread to carry you 'til He ready for you. The world is comin' up and is wise and wise and wise, until we *all* can get some bread from God. Man ain't able to give 'em, God put 'em into that man that he can share around to the next brother.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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[p.46]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Benjamin Bligen

I DO MY OWN WORK NOW

159

The first work I used to do was work on our own farm. I worked to help my father because they really had a hard time to raise us, and we just had to get out and do what we could to help in them days. We had to plant a garden.

Then my daddy was a fisherman, and I began to go in the river along with him and he teach me how to throw net, so I finally learn how to. And

(226)

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9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

KNEE-BONE

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[461]
[501]

Fanny Kemble, in her *Journal*, describes some shout songs—also used for rowing, through a suitable change of rhythm—in the following words:

> I told you formerly that I thought I could trace distinctly some popular national melody with which I was familiar in almost all their songs; but I have been quite at a loss to discover any such foundation for many that I have heard lately and which have appeared to me extraordinarily wild and unaccountable. The way in which the chorus strikes in with the burden, between each phrase of the melody, chanted by a single voice, is very curious and effective, especially with the rhythm of the rowlocks for accompaniment.

But if Fanny Kemble had visited Africa and heard a few of the native songs (such as can now be purchased in gramophone shops specializing in foreign records), she would not have been puzzled by those sung by her husband's slaves.

What was said in 1839 concerning these "unaccountable" songs applies equally well to the songs given in this Chapter. And they are sung today, much as they were then, by descendants of the singers Fanny Kemble mentions. Side by side with these semi-chants you hear songs which show clearly the white man's musical influence. The oldest Negroes say that they shouted after church Sunday afternoons and after prayer meeting at night. Before the shouting began, they sang spirituals and "lined out" hymns. The chances are that all three types were sung from the time the white man concerned himself with the religious instruction of his slaves. In Liberty County the members of the Midway community countenanced a revival in 1838, which lasted two years and was continued by the whites until 1842.

[177]
[196]

In the shout song, Knee-Bone, curious twists and exotic tones are employed—including the musical, yet nasal "ha-nnn"—that must be heard to be appreciated. None of our musical symbols is capable of suggesting the strange turns used in this, as well as others of the more primitive Afro-American chants. If records are not made soon, the elusive beauty which characterizes this type of singing will be irretrievably lost.

The shouter, in this musical chant, obeys instructions and bends the knee far down with the rhythm of the words "Bend my knee-bone to the ground." The rowing version calls for "knee-bone bend to the elbow bend." "Aye Lord" is often substituted for "Ha-nnn Lord."

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

533
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Knee-bone when I call you
H-a-nnn knee-bone
Knee-bone when I call you
H-a-nnn Lord knee-bone bend.
Bend my knee-bone to the ground
H-a-nnn knee-bone
Bend my knee-bone to the ground
H-a-nnn Lord knee-bone bend.
Knee-bone Zachaniah
H-a-nnn knee-bone
Knee-bone Zachaniah
H-a-nnn Lord knee-bone bend.
Knee-bone when I call you
H-a-nnn knee-bone
Knee-bone when I call you
H-a-nnn Lord knee-bone bend.
Knee-bone didn't I call you
H-a-nnn knee-bone
Knee-bone didn't I call you
Ha-ah Lord knee-bone bend.
Knee-bone in the mornin'
H-a-nnn knee-bone
Knee-bone in the mornin'
Ha-ah Lord knee-bone bend.
Knee-bone in the evenin'
H-a-nnn knee-bone
Knee-bone in the evenin'
Ha-ah Lord knee-bone bend.

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Creighton Churchill explains to me that when this song was used for rowing it could have had only one rhythmic accompaniment, the oars, since the other two rhythms, the hands and heels, would have thrown the rowers off their beat. To use his words: "The speed of the rowing version must also have been slower, for one could not possibly row to the rhythm of this version. It should be recognized as well that no musical meter known to man can represent exactly the rhythm of oars in their locks; in this song especially, it is something intangible and personal, like the beat of the Viennese waltz. For the sake of simplicity I have represented the rowing rhythm in this transcription as 2/8, 3/8, 3/8, equal to a full measure of time for the voices and other rhythms."

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

I GWINE T' BEAT DIS RICE

533 243 "J. P." learned this half-chanted composition from his grandfather, Old Quarterman. He never sings the words twice alike, but the rhythm is always the same.

533 539

I gwine t' beat dis rice
Gwine t' beat 'um so
Gwine t' beat 'um until the hu'ks come off
Ah hanh hanh (nasal)
Ah hanh hanh.
Gwine t' cook dis rice when I get through
Gwine t' cook 'um so
Ah hanh hanh.
Ah hanh hanh.
Gwine f' eat mh belly full
Ah hanh hanh
Ah hanh hanh.

ROWING SONGS

501 533 461 175 A hundred years ago, when boats offered the most comfortable and convenient mode of transportation, and provided the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia with their only means of communication with the mainland, the rowing songs were an important adjunct to the work of the oarsmen. English travelers rarely failed to mention them. Captain Basil Hall in his *Travels in North America* (1827–28) tells of leaving Darien—"A neat little village"—and proceeding down the current to St. Simon's Island "in a canoe, some thirty feet long, hollowed out of a cypress tree. The oars were pulled by five smart negroes, merry fellows and very happy looking. . . . They accompanied their labor by a wild sort of song not very unlike that of the Canadian voyageurs, but still more nearly resembling that of the well-known Bunder-boatmen of Bombay." [22]

Fanny Kemble frequently mentioned the singing of the Butler Island oarsmen in her *Journal*, written ten years later. In 1845, Sir Charles Lyell [23] tells of being met at Darien by Mr. Hamilton Couper, who came down the river from Hopeton "in a

[22] The editors of *Slave Songs of the United States* say that "Mr. E. S. Philbrick was struck with the resemblance of some of the rowing tunes at Port Royal to the boatmen's songs he had heard upon the Nile."

[23] Second Visit to the United States.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

long canoe, hollowed out of the trunk of a single cypress and rowed by six negroes, who were singing loudly and keeping time to the stroke of their oars." He went on to say: "For many a mile we saw no habitations, and the solitude was profound; but our black oarsmen made the woods echo to their song. One of them taking the lead, first improvised a verse, paying compliments to his master's family, and to a celebrated black beauty of the neighborhood, who was compared to the 'red bird.' The other five then joined in the chorus, always repeating the same words. Occasionally they struck up a hymn, in which the most sacred subjects were handled with strange familiarity, and which, though nothing irreverent was meant, sounded oddly to our ears, and, when following a love ditty, almost profane."

Lyell's account of his canoe trip from Hopeton to visit Mr. Couper's summer residence on St. Simon's Island, fifteen miles distant, is of interest for several reasons. In describing the Negro houses on Butler Island, where the party landed on their way, he tells us they "were neat, and whitewashed, all floored with wood, each with an apartment called the hall, two sleeping rooms, and a loft for the children" —which is contrary to what Fanny Kemble had written about the selfsame houses a few years earlier. He also mentioned seeing ricks of rice raised on props five feet high, to protect them from the sea, which, during hurricanes, has been known to rise five or six feet. His observations on the mental development of the slaves are particularly significant: "It is evident that on these rice farms, where the negroes associate with scarcely any whites, except the overseer and his family, and have but little intercourse with the slaves of other estates, they must remain far more stationary than where, as in a large part of Georgia, they are about equal in number to the whites, or even form a minority. . . . In Glynn County, where we are now residing, there are no less than four thousand negroes to seven hundred whites,[24] whereas in Georgia generally there are only 281,000 in a population of 691,000 or more whites than colored people."

I give these figures because they explain why more distinctive slave songs can be found in the rice swamps and cotton plantations of the adjoining sea islands than in the Piedmont section where Anglo-Saxon influence has always predominated. In all probability we have the malaria mosquito and the absentee landlords to thank for this. In Africa the black race had developed an immunity to malaria—which they

[24] About the same ratio as when *I* first went to St. Simon's. Charles Spalding Wylly states that in 1810 almost every acre of arable land on St. Simon's was under cultivation. There were fourteen plantations and a slave population of about 1200.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

184 114 out this section is not surprising to those who have studied its social and economic conditions at first hand—or have carefully read *Seed from Madagascar* by Duncan Clinch Heyward. This gentleman's words are authoritative. He learned planting 114 methods and the management of Negro labor at first hand on the Combahee swamp plantations of his paternal ancestors in South Carolina and at the Clinch Plantation, called Refuge, on the Satilla River in Georgia, where his maternal ancestors were also rice planters.

175 522 533 In *American Humor*, Constance Rourke quotes a traveler as saying in 1795 that "The blacks are the great humorists of the nation." She goes on to tell us how Negro humor has always been abundant, and how, from it, early minstrels drew as from a primal source. She also says that many minstrels had lived in the South and West and knew the Negro at first hand. One of them saw an old peddler of watermelons with a donkey cart in a Georgia town, and followed him about until he had mastered his lingo, cries, and snatches of song, which may account for the similarity 175 533 of our Negro secular songs to those of the minstrel stage. Few of the white singers, however, gave credit where it was due. Miss Rourke states that "Plantation owners on the Mississippi had crews of black oarsmen who sang as they rowed and impro- 501 vised good-natured verses to match the occasions of the day. . . .[28] A western poet 461 declared that 'among the earliest original verses of the West were sundry African 587 melodies celebrating the coon hunt and the vicissitudes of river navigation.' The Negro was to be seen everywhere in the South and in the new Southwest, on small farms and great plantations, on roads and levees. He was often an all but equal member of many a pioneering expedition. He became, in short, a dominant figure in spite of his condition and commanded a definite portraiture."

533 199 Because of his position in democratic communities it is readily seen why the songs of the Negro have left their stamp on those of the hill-billy and the cowboy; and when he attended the same revival meetings as the whites—as he frequently did —his mode of singing undoubtedly exerted as much influence upon their religious songs as his secular music does today upon our radio singers.

[28] They carried on a tradition that was characteristic of the South Carolina and Georgia coast. Liverpool, who was stroke oar of the Butler Island crew of ten men, told me they rowed a cypress dugout, thirty-three feet long, made from one immense log. His favorite rowing song was "Zion," but others preferred "Knee-bone." Mrs. G. V. Cate tells us, in Our Todays and Yesterdays, "there was a spirit of rivalry among the planters to have the best boat . . . and a desire on the part of the slaves to sing the best songs. The oarsmen of one plantation would never sing the songs belonging to another plantation," and when a boat passed at night it would be known from the song to what plantation the singers belonged.

171 In A Walk across Africa, Grant describes a very large canoe—hollowed out of an immense tree—that carried a ton and a half.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

OH WHEN I COME TO DIE

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(50)
461

When Willis was a child and went to Lonesome Point for fish and oysters with his father, Adam Proctor, this is the song they often used to make the rowing easier. It is recognized, of course, that the rhythm had to be readjusted to the stroke of the oar. Josephine Young says the song was also used "down on our knees, for watch night 'n prayin'." Needless to say, she would have left off the final g in "dying."

Chorus: O when
(O when)
O when
(O when)
O when I come to die
Give me Jesus.

When I am dying
When I am dying
When I am dying my Lord
Give me Jesus.

(repeat chorus)

When the doctor give me over
When the doctor give me over
When the doctor give me over my Lord
Give me Jesus.

(repeat chorus)

When my friends forsake me
When my friends forsake me
When my friends forsake me my Lord
Give me Jesus.

(repeat chorus)

When trouble is over
When trouble is over
When trouble is over my Lord
Give me Jesus.

(repeat chorus)

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

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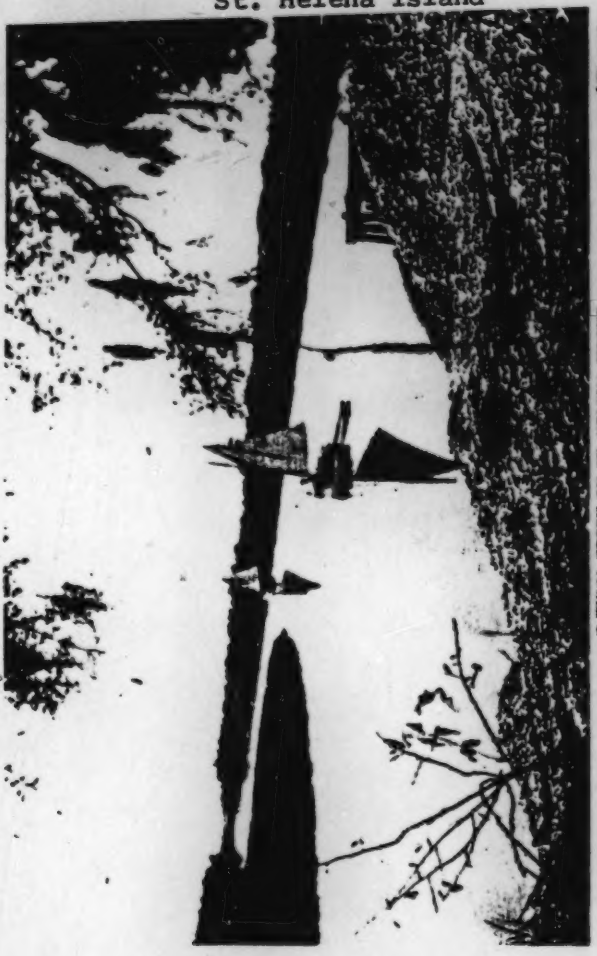
501.



A TIDAL CREEK ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

[facing p. 24]

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11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

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DANCING IN MARSH GRASS

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